The Background of Delinquency

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RECENT study refers juvenile delinquency to the following causes:

1. Overcrowding that forces children to spend time on the streets, flight from home circle, moving pictures, automobiles, radio, television.

Children, more than ever before, are in the company of adults where they are more exposed to adult discussions and conclusions, more often unwise than wise. This is disastrous because children with their limited experience are unable to deal wisely with what they hear and are taught to consider authoritative.

2. The multiplication of laws, to the point where they cease to command general assent and respect.

3. The growth, as a by-product of education, of scepticism and cynicism.

4. The decline of respect for the individual and for his rights.

5. Drift from religion—indifference, even antagonism to the Christian ethic on which our culture is founded.

6. No respect for the law, no fear of the police. "You can't touch me—I'm only a kid."

7. Decline of parental authority. Due to bad example, rather than lack of precept, admonition and reproof.

8. Cynical opportunism—railing against authority—evasion of disliked laws by adults, setting a conditioning of environment for children.

Such a list is limited to superficial surface symptoms; to the boils and carbuncles that indicate deep disorder in the social organism. What then is the virus that vitiates culture?

A recently issued study of juvenile delinquency in California concludes with this admirable declaration: "So we come back to the necessity of satisfying the emotional needs of every child; of providing every child with satisfactory human relationships. Only as we succeed in this, can we hope to build a good society." Those few sentences perfectly express the ambitions of all good parents, of all good pediatricians, and of every psychiatrist who has insight and integrity.

But, to accomplish these fundamental things, we would have had to be able to pick the grandparents and great-grandparents of our children, to have chosen their remote human ancestors, and have been able to influence their prehuman forebears as well. Those prehuman organisms whose conflicts and fears come down through the unending chain of chromosome-carried genes to every newborn infant, constituting much of the "Id" that Freudian dogmas theorize and assign to a place in the organism lying beyond the possibility of awareness, in the unconscious.

The fact that it is alive insures the organism instinctual urges to survive, and to survive in security and comfort if that be possible. But Nature is amazingly lavish and wasteful of life, and it is nothing to be surprised at that, finding some children ill-conditioned to the social order they are to occupy, unyielding Nature wastes their lives. Consider how many ova and sperm male and female organisms generate, and think how few reach their function as adult organisms, as parents. How wasteful, and yet how essential for the survival of those who are to survive. Think of the conflict between sperm and ovum as it begins in human mating. The sperm is an aggressive little bit of protoplasm, aggressive on the ovum; the ovum, in its turn, is resistant; sometimes it destroys the sperm; more often it capitulates. When it does, there is compromise; a compromise that produces the morula. This mulberry-like mass of cells, itself, exhibits the acme of aggression, attacking the lining of the womb as it strives for implantation there in a spot where security and survival will be favored. And the prenatal aggression essential if organisms are to live is only beginning! As the placenta comes into being and digs itself into the uterine walls, contact is made with the maternal blood vessels so that by further aggression the embryo can find protective security and food, not only for that day but for several hundred days to come. With birth, the billions of cells, expressing their biological need, urge the infant to aggression on the breast of the mother in order that they and it may find satisfaction.

From its origin, each cell of the new-born is endowed with aggressive ability to sustain conflict, and a gift for compromise when it encounters resistance. Aggression, conflict and compromise work together to insure survival, not only of the cells, but of the organism which the cells constitute. Nor is the survival of the organism all that is served. For these gifts assure that, when appropriate maturity arrives, there will be power to reproduce the organism and carry on the race.

In its emergent evolution throughout its life, the new organism, itself, will more than sum up the potentialities of the cells, and it will have to use its own aggressive powers to attack the resistant environment in order to acquire the food, air and water, the nitrogen and minerals that it must have if it is to function and to remain alive.

So the new-born child comes into the world as an organism equipped with aggression. It is an aggression ready to be aroused, aroused in response to hunger, a need that comes as a complex of conscious and unconscious desire. (Herein is a perfect demonstration of the unity of body and mind; the ultimate

contradiction of dualism.) The child's need is satisfied, a compromise is made with the mother because satisfaction has ensued for both. Each had a need: The mother to find relief from the pressure of milk in the breast, and the pressure of anxiety for the infant's welfare; the child to find the energy and building material his life and growth demand. At that stage, no one would think of calling the baby bad because it is aggressive and compelled to fight with such means as it has to gain satisfaction for its needs.

But the underlying forces that ultimately take children to the juvenile court, primarily, are just those qualities: Aggression, a sense of individuality, and a willingness to struggle for its own satisfactions.

In older children, the struggle to achieve its own satisfaction may be expressed as revenge, stealing, lying or destructive rowdyism. The latter fault becomes more intense and more disturbing during adolescence; and during adolescence, the sense of individuality, and will-to-power, in those badly-conditioned in early childhood, are often expressed as illicit sex adventures. The psychologists hold that all of these phenomena may be built up as defenses against dissatisfactions and unhappiness visited on children during their infancy. The sum total is anti-social behavior or "badness."

Can parents escape the responsibility for the disasters many of their children have to endure? Well, parents are what they are because they were conditioned to their behaviors and attained their beliefs in their own childhood. They are the products of a culture that had been imposed on them every day since they were born, and on their parents before them. Therein is the vicious circle: The misbehaving child; the family group in which the child was taught, trained and condition to be what it is; the culture which supplied the child's parents, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters with their sense of values and their value judgments.

A child in its family relations can find satisfaction and achieve maturity only if it feels secure, protected, free from uncertainty. And a family circle able to provide these essentials can exist only when the parents themselves feel secure, free from economic, social and personal uncertainty, and have faith in the rightness of their value judgments. In such a home, it makes little difference whether the moral atmosphere is one of austerity or of laxity, provided the children find, in that atmosphere, courtesy, certainty and consistency, leading to a sense of security and belonging; to feel secure, they must know that they are part of a group which is ruled by the ideal of "we" and not by the conflicting demands of many individual "I's."

The father and mother may be stern and exacting, provided they call out their children's respect and make them feel that they, the children, in turn, are respected and made a part of the family's utmost concern; that they belong to a group, not of "give-me's" and "go-getters," but one in which co-operation and mutual consideration are the dominant values. Within the range of their limited experience, children have an acute sense of justice and they estimate its administration much more accurately than many adults can give them credit for, or for that matter, than many adults do.

In these days, when the values men have lived by for twenty centuries are under question, the family circle feels the impact of doubt; the loss of faith; and the result is an uncertainty about right and wrong that not only is hard to live with, but which disrupts the sure pattern of family life. The pattern essential to the achievement for parents and children alike, of those qualities which make individuals mature, effective, useful citizens: Qualities that insure that they, all of them, at all ages, as George Preston points out, should be able to (1) live, (2) live with people, (3) live happily, (4) live productively, (5) live acceptably. In other words, that they will be healthy and stable and able to use the current culture with a minimum of conflict with their fellows and a maximum of satisfaction to themselves.

The organism is a bundle of potential reactions to objects and events in the surrounding world; for children, this is a constantly expanding world, especially in the matter of human beings. It expands from the simplicity of mother-child relationship in infancy, through preschool years to the complexities of school, preadolescent, adolescent and adult environments. Ability to deal with this increasing complexity is the test of maturity. E. B. Holt suggests that genius is a stage of development with high maturity, and that the ethical man has acquired an even higher degree of maturity, in that he is able to put an effective time lag between his responses and the stimulus that comes from the objects and events, many of them very remote, in time or space; and to do this with discrimination and the ability to choose the stimulus that best serves the organism's needs.

Not all parents are going to succeed in achieving this aim. The utility of nature's wastefulness appears in this. Did they all succeed, the world would have no prophets, no revolutionaries, no advance or, if you prefer it, no change, in man's cultural patterns; only dull conformity.

"Goodness" and "badness" have reached types and standards under various conditions of epoch, fashion and circumstance, that vary almost as much as day and night. Too often the standard of goodness for children has been measured by nothing more than how comfortable the little ones are to live with. Preserved Smith, in "The History of Modern Culture," writes, "At all times and in all countries, parents have lavished affection and care on *some* children. But in spite of this, cruelty, spite, ignorance, greed and other evil passions, as well as custom and a perverted sense of parental duty, have made the lives of many children, at most places and in most ages, unhappy."

"Ignorance, custom and a perverted sense of parental duty" function today more often than cruelty, spite, greed and evil passion; and even these latter are more frequently attributable to social and psy-

chic maladjustment of the parents than to inherited original sin. Most often these evils are due to distorted personalities acquired through deforming cultural influences that acted in the parents' childhood; and the parents' parents, in their turn, were subject to the same sort of crippling effects of overstrenuous cultural demands. Consider, for instance, what one great and good man, John Wesley, thought the duty of society to children: The children were "to be waked at 4:00 in the morning, to spend an hour in private devotions." To quote him, "As we have no play-days, neither do we allow any time for play on any day; for he that plays as a child will play as a man." In those days, silence, industry, obedience, respect to elders, truthfulness, respect for the property of others and for one's own pledged word, and conformity to the forms of worship, constituted the pattern of character that God-fearing parents strove to force their children into. The fear of the Lord was the beginning of wisdom but, unfortunately, it was held to be the beginning and end of the philosophy of child-rearing—fear not only of the Lord on high but also of the parents on earth. Fear, the breeder of anxiety.

Of course, our forefathers were striving to do right. To live happily, a child must know that he is only one of many; that the world does not belong to him alone. He must be obedient to circumstance, if not to tyrannical authority. He must learn to respect the property and rights of others, if he is not to be a thief, a liar, or one whose pledges are worthless. The ancients were right in their ambitions for their children's characters, but wrong in the way they went about trying for the result. They believed it possible, by moral and physical force, to fit a child into a preconceived character-pattern. They had unbounded faith in admonition, reproof and punishment, and their well-intended but mistaken efforts caused endless unhappiness, but no more than the lax or careless methods of many modern parents, perhaps not so much.

The child's possibilities for character development for good or for bad, are locked up in it at birth. To bring them out fully and finely, what it most needs physically, are sunshine, fresh air, and free range away from too close contact with too many grown-ups. What it most needs for character development is guidance in a simple environment that is allowed slowly to get more complex as the child grows older.

And also in every human breast there is lodged the tendency to react violently against injustice and tyranny, whether political or parental. On this trend of human nature is based all spiritual progress, all aspiration of the individual soul. Without it man could never have ascended from the slaveries of primitive authoritarianism or of feudal medievalism.

Such an instinct is awake and is active in the breast of every child, but the child's lack of experience, and the parent's lack of comprehension or of consideration, often bring about a degeneration of this noble spirit until it becomes the blind, devastating force that the psychologists have called "negativism"—negativism, the destructive spirit which brings the child into unremitting conflict with his parents, and the adult into battle against the reasonable things of life.

One may well ask how far this widely cultivated negativism provides the germ for the disrupting philosophy of positivistic nihilism that is overtaking the world, filling the minds of men with doubt, uncertainty and distress.

Man's access to the universe is exceedingly limited. It is limited by his five senses, which keep him informed of some of the changes that occur in his immediate environment, and of these changes only. Through this narrow access our forefathers gained a picture of a universe of stars and stardust, of fire and water, earth and air. Within the last century, there has been added a concept of matter, made up of atoms and molecules, both beyond vision and apprehensible only by virtue of imagination. From such a concept of matter grew science and the materialistic philosophy that has come to be ascendant in the 19th and 20th centuries. Today the accepted picture is of a dynamic universe of scattered galaxies of stars at immense distances apart, spread infinitely through what man's mind conceives to be space. Each galaxy is made up of stars, each star itself a sort of lesser galaxy of incessantly moving molecules and atoms, each atom in its turn reproducing the timeless whirl of its constituent particles. A retelling of Heroclitus' dream that "all things flow"—yet who can say with certainty that these figments of the human imagination picture anything of cosmic reality. At the best, what is pictured is an unfeeling universe, terrible and impersonal.

It has been said, "No man can stand naked before the stars." Because of his instinctive fear of the terrible, unfeeling, impersonal universe, in his deepest nature, early man was compelled to search for comfort; for something which would allay his fears. Thus he was impelled to find a satisfying explanation of himself, of his environment and of their interrelation. If he were to survive, he had perforce to find some meaning, some reason for the universe and for himself as part of the universe.

And to help him out in that search for comfort, that flight from fear of the unknown, man called upon a quality which seems to be as intimately a part of him as the material of his blood and bone—the power of phantasy, of day-dreaming. Historically, the earliest known to us of this flow of phantasy was expressed in what the anthropologists call animism, or, better, animatism, in which all the forces of nature which he could discern were endowed each with a life of its own. It is a phantasy that still dominates the thinking and feeling of primitive tribes and, through that human quality, which Professor Freud has personified as the Id, it reaches into our own daily lives, into even that of the most sophisticated modern man, bringing with it residues of fears and perplexities inherited from human and prehuman ancestors.

However, as a major force in man's attempt to adjust himself comfortably to the universe, in time

animatism gave way because of the accumulation of what we are pleased to think of as factual experience. It gave way to anthropomorphism—another form of phantasy which personifies nature and endows her with all the qualities a man believes himself to have. By analogy with his own behavior, earlier man explained the otherwise incomprehensible behavior of the world around him. In the process of this anthropomorphic adjustment, various tribes, races and breeds of men, according to their experience and the ease or difficulty they encountered in finding the means of survival (food, water, shelter), created for themselves many gods in their own images. In the further flow of time, as men came more and more to be integrated into social groupings, and to reach more or less common ideals, monotheism, based upon the experience of the father of the human family—protector, director and dictator—was widely accepted.

For us of the Western world, the priestly servants of such a sovereign God formulated statements of purpose and principles which seemed best to serve the survival of the human race under the circumstances of the time. Thus, humanity was supplied with principles woven into a pattern which seemed to make it easier for the general body of men to fulfill these purposes. For twenty centuries, those principles and purposes have been accepted by what we know as Western civilization. They have been expressed in the various philosophies and religions, designed to serve the survival, security and satisfaction of human beings in this unfathomable space which man has given the name Universe. Out of these developments arose the ideas of evil and good, of taboo and permissibility; and with them came the establishment of authoritative social orders varying with era, locality, climate, sacerdotal ambition and economic need. The leaders of such social orders became the dispensers of the authority necessary to keep civilization functioning in ways they approved.

The family was recognized as a biologic expression of such an order, not only as a biological unit, protective of its individuals, but as a social organism, the nucleus of a larger society. The displacement of the family interest as an ultimate by the individual's interest is one of the crippling defects of modern society. Man, as he struggled for personal security, comfort and survival, acquired concepts of good and evil. All that he fancied served these ends he accepted as good; what he felt hindered them, evil.

The stage of man's history when he pictured nature and nature's forces as endowed with human qualities was the era of priests, kings, religions and philosophies. The primacy of that era was at its height five hundred years ago; it remained dominant until the mid-nineteenth century and today still is extraordinarily influential, perhaps even more so than the materialistic, mechanical teachings that are supposed, with the coming of science, to have overthrown it.

It is odd to think that all the mathematics and physics that give validity to the concepts of Galileo and Newton are based fundamentally on a phantasy, on the concept of an imagined point and a belief in lines of force passing through points postulated to occupy the exact centers of bodies; abstractions that can be useful only in terms of the concepts of number and mathematics. Points and lines are purely imaginary quantities. They cannot be created physically or as such be appreciated by our senses and they are translatable to them only as parts of visible measurable surfaces. No one knows whether numbers were invented or were discovered, whether they are part of a natural order or merely ingenious devices man has created and uses in his attempts to explore his environment.

All this may seem to have no bearing on the problem of child behavior, but it has, for mankind's convictions about good and evil dictate the family judgment of the goodness or badness of its children. On this conviction is based the one essential quality of family life which provides the important conditioning forces out of which will emerge the child's "style of life." One thing above others that a child needs to be protected against is confusion in authority, and another, equally important, is uncertainty in family purpose. And yet, how can it be so protected when the social order itself is so uncertain and so disordered? Nowhere today is there any possibility of certain knowledge or of a consistent development of an agreed canon of desirable behavior. We suffer from some of the residues of animistic conceptual method. Half our actions, social and intellectual, are dictated by residues of anthropomorphic belief; residues that, in the light of current materialism, some of us resist with more or less determination. The result is that we are an uncertain generation of little faith—disillusioned, even while we seek shelter and comfort in new phantasies.

C. E. M. Joad recently put the present issue of our confusion this way. He was dealing with the latest expression of the materialistic, mathematical philosophy, a revival of Comte's positivism, a restatement of that philosophy, buttressed by an appeal to up-to-date physical science. Joad says, "The traditional philosophy of Western Europe holds that transcending the familiar world of things known to us by our senses and explorable by science, there is another of reality that contains values which are qualitative. Of these values, goodness, beauty and truth are preeminent and are the sources, respectively, of ethics, aesthetics and logic. In other words, it is because the universe is, or contains, a moral order that some things are right and some wrong; because it contains an aesthetic order, some things are beautiful and some ugly, and because there is such a thing as truth, that certain judgments are false and others true. Many philosophers would add that the universe contains also a Deity, the source of the values Goodness, Truth and Beauty, these being, as religion puts it, the modes of the Deity's revelation to man. Metaphysics, for these philosophers, is the study of the reality that

transcends and underlies the familiar world of sense impressions and is, therefore, in part the study of values and of God.

"These ideas are the general outcome of Western philosophical thinking, reinforced by Christianity over the past nineteen centuries. It is a dual purpose of Western philosophy to reveal truth and to increase virtue by providing man with principles to live by and purposes to live for—principles derived from an examination of values. The principles are those of morality and the purposes are the attainment of an increase in what is good, beautiful and true, in one's individual life and in the total human community."

With the increasing influence of a materialistic philosophy of science on opinion, doubt, which is essential to the purpose of science, began to gather quite illogically about the conception of transcendental values; so that, with the advent of the 19th Century, positivism gathered vitality and emerged as "Logical Positivism." As a result this large and very influential school among leaders of scholarly opinion tells us that there are no such things as value judgments, for, say these men, "there are no values, and the true function of philosophy is no more than to clarify the propositions of science by exhibiting their logical relationships and by defining the symbols that occur in those propositions."

These logical positivists tell us that propositions which have meaning fall into one of two classes; those that concern empirical matters of fact and those which philosophers have called "a priori," and which concern the "relations of ideas." The former have meaning only if they can be verified—verification meaning that some possible sense experience should be relevant to determine their truth or falsehood. The latter group, those which concern the relations of ideas, are the propositions of mathematics and of logic. They are certain, say the positivists, only because they are purely analytical.

These thinkers maintain that all metaphysical assertions, that is to say, all assertions about a realm of values transcending the world accessible to sense are meaningless because only those empirical propositions have meaning which can theoretically be verified; and since any sense experience must inevitably be an experience of the familiar world and not, therefore, of an order of reality transcending the familiar world, no metaphysical proposition can be verified and it cannot be asserted that there is a non-empirical world of values.

Therefore, according to the teaching of the positivists (and they teach widely) all value judgments are valueless; hence, ethics, aesthetics and religion are without worth. They say that the statement, "This is wrong," cannot be wholly reduced to empirical concepts since there is no sense experience of the quality of wrongness. Therefore, as it is not empirically verifiable, it follows that the statement, "This is wrong," is meaningless. Likewise, the statements, "This is beautiful," "This is good," "This is bad," because these express value judgments and cannot be analyzed, they would dismiss as meaningless. Any such statement, they say, can do no more than express the moral, aesthetic or religious feelings of the person who uses them. It cannot be argued about. Extending this line of discussion, the positivist philosophy dismisses as without meaning the ideas, not only of Deity, but even of belief and disbelief, for, in their view, God is a metaphysical term belonging to an assumed reality that transcends the world of sense experience. The idea of God, therefore, comes under the general ban on all metaphysical statements; to say that He exists is neither true nor false; it is neither atheistic nor agnostic; it is simply meaningless. It is the contention of this philosophy that both scepticism and doubt become equally irrational; belief and disbelief cease to be in the list of subjects suitable for intellectual consideration, and philosophy is left without any wisdom to offer the world or any guidance for the perplexed human race.

It may seem that it is overweighting the teaching of a small group of philosophers to attribute to it widespread social influence, but such ideas diffuse downwards; rapidly, inevitably reaching innumerable individuals to whom philosophy is an alien word. However, amongst these are myriads of the uncertain, confused, fearful, dissatisfied and resentful. These avidly absorb this materialistic nihilistic teaching with all the greater ease when assured, as so often they are, that this gospel of denial is based on "Science," a word, a verbal symbol, that for those ignorant of the activities and practices of physical science, has taken on implications of magic.

What has this to do with good and bad children? Everything! Increasing delinquency may well be the forerunner of social collapse. The confusion and uncertainty about what is bad and what is good that these philosophical conflicts promote, invade countless families and are reflected in unsound intrafamily relationships, robbing children of the certainties and serenities essential if they are to become well adjusted to the family situation. Dwelling in such unhappy, uncertain, confusing family conditions, the little ones are robbed of the education, conditioning, training and the practice in behavior necessary if they are to live their own future lives happily and efficiently. And, in addition, the situation tends to exalt and exaggerate the feeling of egoistic individuality at the expense of group unity. Such a philosophy felt but not realized is a source, probably, of the adult unrest which so often drives grown-ups of the family to retreat into alcoholism, thus importing further irrationality, uncertainty and discomfort into the family life. It is often overlooked that the parents' habitual moderate alcoholic indulgence is as apt to create these uncertainties and these family life disorders as a parent's occasional indulgence in excessive drinking.

All these intrafamily disturbances conspire to rob the children of the education, behavior and conditioning for entering into personal relationships necessary if they are to live their own future lives

happily and efficiently, able to meet any social situation of which they may find themselves a part. The healthy growth of the individual depends on a healthy family life. And that, in itself, depends on a satisfying understanding and utilization of moral values.

Thus, so-called "bad" children are fruits as well as the victims of defective value judgments on the part of families—defective judgments derived from a culture that exalts materialistic hedonism, and rejects transcendental values; a culture that discourages the enjoyment of life for its own sake; that leads men to forget the lesson that gave the Greeks contentment; the lesson that Euripides expressed in the lines, "He who knows as the long day goes that to live is happy, has won his heaven"; a culture that robs man of comfort in those dreams of his that give him confidence in the idea of transcendental values; values which his consciousness has no difficulty in utilizing as the bases of truth, beauty and justice; ideas which alone have enabled humanity to rise above the beast level; ideas without which the most materialistic scientific investigator would have no criterion of honesty, a virtue which, after all, is what gives science its ultimate worth, and the scientist his power and his satisfactions.

And, so far as children's social delinquency is concerned, the so-called "bad" children are the fruits of defective judgments on the part of families responsible for bringing up the young. Value judgments distorted by materialistic cultures which supply families with the only basic materials they can have for their moral standards in a world that has rejected the transcendental.

We have to ask ourselves, then, whose is the responsibility for the delinquency of the child?—the child's, its parents' or the social order's which, through its encouragement and taboos, establishes bases for such values as the parents must acquire.

I wish that every parent might read, and learn by heart, the exquisite lines of Charles Peguy:

"Childhood, a budding, a promise, a pledge. . . ."

". . . . that little earnest of a bud which shows itself at the beginning of April.

"It is the bud that looks as if it were the tree's parasite, as if it ate at the tree's table . . .

"And yet it is from that bud, on the contrary, that everything comes.

"Without a bud that once appeared, the tree would not exist. Without those thousands of buds that come out once at the beginning of April and sometimes in the last days of March, nothing would last, the tree would not last and would not keep its place as a tree. . . .

". . . All life comes from tenderness. All life comes from that tender, delicate April bud. . . .

"Now I tell you, says God, that without that late April budding, without those thousands of buds, without that one little budding of hope, which obviously anyone can break off, without that tender, cotton-like bud, which the first man who comes along can snap off with his nail, the whole of my creation would be nothing but dead wood.

"And the dead wood will be cast into the fire."

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